

# KING HORN

A Prose Rendition

Adapted and Annotated by

MICHAEL L. HAYS, Ph.D.

## CONTENTS

### I. SUDDENE: INVOCATION, INTRODUCTION, AND DEPOSAL

Invasion, conquest, and occupation of Suddene  
Exile

### II. WESTERNESSE: KNIGHTHOOD AND BETROTHAL

Arrival on the shore, address to ship, and greeting by Aylmar  
Love affair with Rymenhild  
Testing by Athelbrus and Athulf  
Horn's first chamber visit and request to be knighted  
Knighting by Aylmar  
Horn's second chamber visit and request to prove self  
Defeat of invading Saracens  
Horn's third chamber visit and Rymenhild's dream  
Betrayal by Fikenhild  
Expulsion/separation and promise to return in seven years

### III. IRELAND: STEWARDSHIP

Arrival, and greetings by Berold and Herold, and Thurston  
Giant's challenge and Horn's avenging father's murder  
Refusal of marriage but promise of seven years' service  
Meeting with Rymenhild's messenger about marriage to Mody  
Request for aid in payment for his service and return

### IV. WESTERNESSE: MARRIAGE

Meeting with palmer and disguising  
Entrance at castle gate and drinks at the wedding feast  
False death report, Rymenhild's attempted suicide, and reunion

### V. SUDDENE: RESTORATION\*

Nighttime arrival and discovery of knight, Athulf's father  
Summons to people and overthrow of Saracens  
Dream and return

### VI. WESTERNESSE: RESCUE AND REVENGE

Fikenhild's abduction of Rymenhild and Arnoldin's greeting  
Disguise as harpers and slaying of Fikenhild

### VII. SUDDENE: CORONATION, CONCLUSION, AND BENEDICTION

Distribution of rewards  
Return to Suddene and celebration of marriage to Rymenhild

## INTRODUCTION

*King Horn* is the earliest extant English medieval romance. Scholars date it from the first third of the thirteenth century, from around 1225. Despite its early advent, it is a sophisticated work, carefully structured and subtlety developed. Whoever the author is, he—clerics were literate; women and other men seldom were—is skilled in narrative and diplomatic in introducing religious allusions and analogues.

Unlike the secular literature of its day which celebrated fighting and feats of arms, *King Horn* includes an amatory relationship between hero and heroine. This difference is the primary distinction between epics and gestes—stories of war and battle—and medieval romances. “Romance” is a tricky term because it has different meanings at different times. I mean romance as a story of a man’s adventure on account of, usually on behalf of, a woman. In medieval, mainly chivalric, romance, the emphasis is on action, not emotion, and the emotional relationship between the knight and the damsel or lady is seldom elaborated. Although *King Horn* develops the amatory relationship more fully than most medieval romances do, it maintains its primary interest in the adventures of the hero and his quest to achieve his goals. Most renaissance and almost all modern romances reverse this emphasis.

For that reason, because such amatory relationships have been a part of English and American literature for nearly 800 years, the relationship between Rymenhild and Horn may seem commonplace and clichéd. But it did not seem so in its own time; then, it was something new and fresh in English literature. Indeed, it seems to have launched the romance tradition in England, a tradition arising in western Europe and making the greatest contribution of the medieval period to western literature. Many English writers—not least, Chaucer, Malory, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, and major early novelists—were influenced and often inspired by medieval romance. In fact, what we call novels were once called romances. *King Horn* may seem commonplace and clichéd because what was new and fresh in its time has long been a part of our ordinary cultural experience. So we may have some difficulty recognizing its originality and appreciating its achievement. But our debt to medieval romances is pervasive, even if unperceived, today; lacking its romance elements, *Star Wars* probably could not exist.

The relationship between Rymenhild and Horn receives considerable attention and careful treatment in *King Horn*, but it is not the dominant concern. Horn’s succession to political and religious leadership is. His story begins with the defeat of Murry, his father, king of Suddene; the retreat of Godhild, his mother, to a cave where she continues Christian worship; and his exile with twelve friends. The story ends with Horn’s return to Suddene, the defeat of its pagan occupiers, the restoration of Christian religion, and the coronation of Rymenhild as his queen. So Horn leaves Suddene for Westernesse, then leaves Westernesse for Suddene—a pattern instancing the exile-and-return motif common in English romance. It is invariably associated with political and religious rule and frequently with the qualifications of the successor to resume his rightful position.

The subordinate status of the amatory relationship is shown in two ways. First, it is framed by the story of Horn’s exile-and-return. Even the events at or involving Westernesse focus on Horn. His forced departure for and return from Ireland are an instance of the exile-and-return motif; this movement, as paralleled by his departure from and return to Rymenhild, instances a separation-and-return motif. Although some attention is given to Rymenhild’s unhappiness, more is given to Horn’s display of

military, political, and social skills in Ireland. Second, and typical of the genre, this romance gives little attention to their marriage. They marry on the basis of a private (but Church-sanctioned) troth-plight, not a ceremony. Later, threatened marriages to others heighten the perils of separation or the acts of treachery.

Thus, between the beginning and the end, *King Horn* presents us, in the figure of Horn, with a model of right conduct. Horn's unequalled beauty and royal birth could do much—indeed, they do do much—for him, but he insists that he prove himself. This romance, like all romances, takes the side of merit in the medieval debate on nobility, whether it arises from birth or merit. (Of course, if romances did not take this side, they might have little story to tell.) Thus, Horn insists on being knighted before he allows a relationship with Rymenhild, and refuses to marry her until he has proven himself as a knight. Only then does he grant her wishes.

The relationship is remarkable in many ways. The names are obviously ironic. We expect sexual aggressiveness of a young man named Horn (i.e., penis); we get restraint. We expect sexual modesty of a young woman named Rymenhild (i.e., holder of ice); we get passion. The irony is delightful, but it has a point—to show Horn as a potential ruler capable of self-discipline. Given that rulers at the time had, not only the power, but the right, of first possession of a maiden, Horn's conduct is a silent reproach to the policy and practice of the time. Nothing in this romance suggests that men should be aggressive sexual predators and women, their passive sexual prey.

Finally, a word on what may seem to us unrealistic and thus silly. The characters often seem to lack adequate motivation, and the action often shifts quickly from one place to another, without suitable explanation. For instance, Horn seems to torment Rymenhild quite deliberately, most noticeably in the story of his death which he tells her maid. Immediately thereafter, Horn arrives just in time to save Rymenhild from committing suicide, but the story does not explain why he tells this story or how he gets to her chamber or even how he knows to do so. But, if we had an explanation, it would not matter to our understanding of the story; what does matter is her true love and his dramatic rescue, not the plausibility of such an episode. So it is with much of the story and its chances and coincidences; the interest is in what happens, not why, and what it means in terms of moral action, not psycho-social mechanics.

In sum, *King Horn*, like many medieval romances, involves issues of personal identity—who am I? (puns on Horn's name and disguises indicate this issue)—and personal worth—what can I do?—in terms of achievement, or birth versus merit. This romance stresses Horn's royal birth and good looks. But, as it develops, it stresses Horn's efforts to prove himself a worthy knight, to avenge his father's death, to recover this father's kingdom, and to restore order and religion to it. Horn may be born to the throne, but he must prove his entitlement to it; he may be declared a knight, but he must prove his prowess through chivalric deeds. More, Horn has a mission, and his activities are framed by the larger story of the loss and recovery of his country to an invading army, and the break-up of a family. Thus, individual behavior is seen within a social environment, and the fate and fortunes of both are linked to each other. Horn cannot recover his father's country or establish a family until he has proven himself in combat and court, in war and love—the essential stuff of romance. The outcome, the perfect triumph of good over evil which we call “poetic justice,” is the way romance often ends, not because the world is that way, but because it should be that way. Thus, romance is not silly because it is unrealistic, but serious because it is idealistic, giving

expression to our highest personal and social aspirations. *King Horn* is the first English romance to make this bold assertion.

## I. SUDDENE: INVOCATION, INTRODUCTION, AND DEPOSAL<sup>1</sup>

May all be happy who listen to my song!

I shall sing you a song of Murry the King, who ruled in the West as long as he lived. He had a queen named Godhild; there was no woman more beautiful than she. He had a son named Horn<sup>2</sup>; there was no one upon whom the rain might fall or the sun might shine fairer than he. At the age of fifteen,<sup>3</sup> his skin was white, his cheeks ruddy, his eyes sparkling. No kingdom had another like him.

Horn had twelve handsome friends,<sup>4</sup> all sons of rich men, who played together. Of these, two were his special friends: one was Athulf, the best of friends; the other was Fikenhild, unsuspected by Horn, the worst of friends.<sup>5</sup>

One summer day,<sup>6</sup> the good king Murry rode on his horse by the seaside, as he often did. Riding with but two friends—far too few—he discovered that fifteen ships of bold Saracens had arrived in his country.<sup>7</sup> He approached them and asked what brought them to his land and what they sought. One of the pagans who heard him replied quickly, “we intend to slay all the people in your land, all those who love Christ, and you first of all right now, for you shall not get away from us.” The king and his two friends dismounted, drew their swords, and began to fight the Saracens.<sup>8</sup> The king had too few men to overcome so strong a foe; although they killed many, they were overwhelmed by the fierce Saracens.

Shortly thereafter, the Saracens spread throughout the land and took control of it. They killed many people and destroyed their churches. They spared neither strangers nor relations unless they gave up their religion and converted to paganism. Of all women, the worst off was Godhild, who wept bitterly for Murry and even more for Horn.

---

<sup>1</sup> My notes are intended to explain specific details in this romance and to identify commonplaces in many romances shared by this one. I have identified only some of the Biblical allusions in *King Horn*. It may be that the author was clerical, for the blending of Biblical, usually specifically Christian, allusions in an otherwise non-religious work was a common practice in the early medieval period. Indeed, the practice goes back at least as far as *Beowulf* (c. 725) in the Old English period. It may also be that various Christian analogues are used as well. I have also noted parallels between *King Horn* and a limited number of later romances and some Shakespearean plays as a way of indicating the persistence of romance motifs in later literature.

<sup>2</sup> The name suggests penis; in this sense, its use is ironic, for the story demonstrates male restraint in upholding sexual morals.

<sup>3</sup> By modern reckoning, Horn is 14, the age at which boys become squires and learn the arts of knighthood.

<sup>4</sup> The number equals the number of the apostles.

<sup>5</sup> Fikenhild is a type of Judas. The contrast of good and bad friends or counselors is a common motif in medieval and renaissance literature as in Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* and in *Macbeth*.

<sup>6</sup> By convention, romances usually occur in spring or, more rarely, in summer, especially in May, commonly on the first day of the month, May Day.

<sup>7</sup> Saracens, pagans, heathens, hounds, dogs—all enemies of the Christian hero and local population—were probably bands of marauding neighbors or invading Vikings, whose raids and depredations affected the British Isles for centuries, long after the Norman Conquest. As enemies, they are often characterized as anti-Christian and black, a morally rather than a physically descriptive epithet, as well as barbaric.

<sup>8</sup> Fighting on foot with swords was the Saxon way of fighting; fighting on horseback with spears was the French, the chivalric, way of fighting.

She left the maidens attending her, departed the royal hall, and retired to a cave such as hermits inhabit, where she lived alone. There, despite the Saracens' prohibitions, she served God in such a way that the pagans knew nothing about it. Daily she prayed for her son Horn, that Jesus Christ might be merciful to him.

The Saracens held Horn and his friends captive. The pagans intended either to kill him or to flay him alive except that Horn was so handsome—Jesus Christ made him so.<sup>9</sup> Then an emir spoke to him in blunt words: “Horn, it is plain that you are a bold lad, fair, tall, and strong, and will grow more so in the next seven years.<sup>10</sup> If it so happened that you and your friends were to leave this land alive, you would return to slay us all, by sword or knife, to revenge your father's death. So, you and your friends shall be put into a boat, set adrift, and let drown. The sea will overwhelm you, and we shall not regret it.”

The young men, wringing their hands in despair, were taken to the shore and instantly put aboard ship. Horn had often been sad but never more than then. The tide began to rise, and Horn guided the ship out to sea. The sea drove the ship so fast that it frightened the young men.<sup>11</sup> All that day and all that night, until the sun rose again, they expected to lose their lives. Then Horn saw an island and men on its shore. He said, “Friends, I have news for you. I hear birds singing and see the grass growing. Let us be happy that we are alive, for our ship is going to land here.”<sup>12</sup>

## II. WESTERNESSE: KNIGHTHOOD AND BETROTHAL

As soon as they anchored the ship, the young men waded ashore and set foot on dry ground. Then Horn, born in Suddene, spoke to the ship: “Ship by the sea, have good days. On the edge of the sea, take in no water. If you come to Suddene, greet well my relatives; greet well my mother, the good queen Godhild; and tell Jesus Christ's adversary, the pagan king, that I am whole and sound in the land in which I have arrived. Tell him that all the pagans will feel it when I strike them in my turn.”<sup>13</sup> With that, the young men began to sing as they walked through the land, over dunes and dales.

They soon met King Aylmar, King of Westernesse—Christ give him His blessing and much happiness! He spoke gentle words to Horn: “Where do you come from, you thirteen daring young men? By God, who made me, I never saw such a fair group in a western land. Tell me what you seek.”

Horn replied for all; it was right that he, as the fairest and smartest of them, did so. “We be of Suddene and come of good families, very good kings, and Christian blood. Pagans invaded our land and attacked all of us. They killed and quartered many

---

<sup>9</sup> The physical attractiveness of the hero often saves his life.

<sup>10</sup> Seven years is a conventional period of separation or labors (e.g., Jacob's seven-year effort to win Rachel).

<sup>11</sup> This episode parallels the story of the storm on the lake in Mt 8.23-27; Mk 4.35-41; and Lk 8.22-25.

<sup>12</sup> According to a common romance motif, the survival of those set adrift in boats indicates their innocence.

<sup>13</sup> Apostrophe is a literary convention in epic and romance used to disclose the speaker's mind.

Christians. As Christ may be my guide, they put us into a ship and set us adrift. We spent two days on the sea without a sail or a rudder; then our ship began to drift toward this shore. Now you might bind our hands behind us and slay us. But if it is your will, help us so that we do not die.”

Then the good king—he was indeed no villain—asked in reply: “Tell me, young man, what is your name? You shall have nothing but what is pleasing.”<sup>14</sup>

The young man answered at once. “I, who came out of the boat at the shore, am called Horn. King, well may you prosper.”<sup>15</sup>

Then the good king replied. “May you enjoy your name well. Horn, you will go well by dales and halls. Horn, you will echo loudly from dunes to dales.<sup>16</sup> Your name and fairness will spring from king to king throughout Westernesse, and the strength of your hand extend to every land. Horn, you are so appealing that I may not abandon you.” Then Aylmar rode home with Horn, his foundling,<sup>17</sup> and with all Horn’s dear friends.

The king joined all his knights when he came into his hall. He summoned Athelbrus, the steward of his house,<sup>18</sup> and spoke to him: “Steward, take charge of Horn, my foundling here, in order to instruct him in your skills, of wood and of river,<sup>19</sup> and teach him to play the harp with his sharp nails,<sup>20</sup> to sing, to carve meat before me, and to serve the cup. Teach him all that you know. And teach his friends other services.”<sup>21</sup>

Athelbrus taught Horn and his friends. Horn was pleased with all that Athelbrus taught him. Everywhere, in court and out, all men loved Horn, and Rymenhild,<sup>22</sup> the king’s daughter, loved him most. She thought about him constantly; she loved him so much that she began to wax wild. She was extremely shy of all people. In this case, she could not speak a word to him at the table, in the hall among other knights, or in any other place, whether day or night. Her sorrow and her anguish had no limit. She was so upset that she made a decision: she would send a messenger to tell Athelbrus to come to her and bring Horn with him to her chamber, for she looked sad and seemed ill; and to

---

<sup>14</sup> Horn discloses his social, political, and religious standing before his personal identity.

<sup>15</sup> Speeches on the shore are a conventional way of having the hero describe his origins, descent, and religion.

<sup>16</sup> This pun on Horn’s name foreshadows the later revolt.

<sup>17</sup> An abandoned child, a common motif of folk tale and romance, is usually associated with the quest for and discovery of identity, almost invariably noble (e.g., Fielding’s *Tom Jones*).

<sup>18</sup> Stewards are the guardian, or manager, of a castle, estate, or kingdom, on behalf of the rightful ruler. Medieval and even some renaissance literature involve plots of untrustworthy stewards.

<sup>19</sup> These skills are associated with hunting with hounds or hawks, both, especially falconry, reserved by law for the nobility. Royal forests were large tracts set aside for these purposes, for which reason poaching was severely punished. In the Robin Hood stories, Sherwood Forest is such a royal preserve.

<sup>20</sup> Sharp, or long, nails signify feudal aristocracy which, unlike heroic aristocracy, does no manual labor. Today, long nails suggest little or no manual labor but no longer suggest social class.

<sup>21</sup> Carving meat and serving wine were tasks reserved for training a young nobleman, especially a favored one; thus, Horn’s friends are assigned different tasks.

<sup>22</sup> The name means holder of rime, or frost; it can be translated to mean “ice maiden.” If so, her name, like Horn’s is ironic, since she is unabashedly passionate.



tell Athelbrus to come quickly, for she was anything but happy.<sup>23</sup>

The steward was sad at heart, for he did not know what to do. What Rymenhild wanted—him to bring Horn to her chamber—seemed strange to him. He thought it boded no good; he decided to take someone else in Horn’s place, his friend Athulf.<sup>24</sup> He said to him, “Athulf, you must go with me to Rymenhild’s chamber right now to speak in private with her and learn her will. You must dress in Horn’s likeness in order to deceive her. I am much afraid she would lead Horn into trouble.”<sup>25</sup>

Athelbrus directed Athulf and went with him to Rymenhild’s chamber. Imagining that Athulf was Horn, she at once began to wax wild upon him. She sat near him on her bed<sup>26</sup> and embraced him with her arms.<sup>27</sup> She said, “Horn, for a long time, I have loved you greatly. With our hands joined, you shall plight your troth right now, to hold me as your wife and I to hold you as my lord.”<sup>28</sup>

Athulf whispered to her as softly as he could, “Do not talk to me about this matter, for I am not Horn. I am not his equal; Horn is fairer and richer, fairer by one rib than any other man alive.<sup>29</sup> Even were Horn under earth—wherever else he would be or a thousand miles away—I would not deceive you as if I were he.”

Rymenhild turned herself to Athelbrus and furiously berated him. “Get out of here, you foul thief; you will never more be a favorite of mine! Get out of my chamber, and may ill fortune befall you! May shame take you and hang you on a high gallows. I speak not of this Horn—he has not behaved so badly. And Horn is fairer than he is. May you die in great disgrace.”

Athelbrus promptly fell to his knees. “My lady, listen to me a little! Hear why I hesitated to bring Horn to you. Horn is fair and rich, and has no equal anywhere. Aylmar, the good king, placed him in my care. If Horn were here, I suspect that the two of you would play between yourselves. Then, without an oath, the king would make us sorry. Rymenhild, my lady, my queen, forgive me your displeasure, and I shall bring Horn, whatever anyone may say.”

Rymenhild, pausing before she replied, thus gave herself time to think out a better

---

<sup>23</sup> Using an intermediary, though a fact of social life, is a characteristic feature of courtship conducted according to the conventions of courtly love.

<sup>24</sup> Athelbrus’s hesitation and his intention to test Rymenhild reflect concern to obey Aylmar’s charge to attend to Horn.

<sup>25</sup> Disguises are a commonplace in romances and always work.

<sup>26</sup> A bed was often the only piece of bedroom furniture. Thus, sitting side-by-side on a bed indicated social equality between two people; an inferior sat on carpets or furs on the floor. In itself, such seating was not an invitation for sexual dalliance.

<sup>27</sup> The romantically aggressive female is unconventional in most romances, but, in some romances, her passion suggests the hero’s attractiveness. Such female passion especially characterizes pagan princesses, like Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1300). An interesting use of this motif occurs in *Othello*, in which Desdemona falls in love with Othello, encourages his courtship, and elopes with him.

<sup>28</sup> Troth plighting was a valid marriage contract between a man and a woman without benefit of a ceremony and was accepted as such by the medieval Catholic church.

<sup>29</sup> The allusion, to Adam before God created Eve, suggests Horn’s moral perfection, not only his virginity.

idea. Then she said, "Go now, this minute, and, after midday, send him dressed like a squire. When the king rises to go to the wood to hunt, let none betray Horn. He shall remain with me until nearly evening, until I have my will of him. After that, I do not care what people say."<sup>30</sup>

Athelbrus left. In the hall, he found Horn, pouring wine for the king at the table. To him he whispered, "Horn, gracious as you are, go quietly to Rymenhild's chamber after the meal and stay with her. Keep any rash words in your heart. Follow my advice, and you will never regret it."

Horn took to heart all that he said. He went directly to Rymenhild the bright. When he appeared, the chamber seemed to grow lighter.<sup>31</sup> He approached, knelt, and greeted her sweetly.<sup>32</sup> He made a pleasing speech; no man needed to teach him how. "May you live well at ease, Rymenhild the bright, with your six maids who sit beside you. Our king's steward sent me to your chamber so that I might speak with you. Tell me what you want to; speak, and I shall hear what you want."

Rymenhild arose and took him by the hand. She set him on a pillow and served him wine so that he might drink his fill. She made him fair cheer, put her arm around his neck, and kissed him as often as it pleased her. She said, "Horn, without debate, you shall have me as your wife. Horn, have pity on me and pledge me your troth."

Horn, wondering what he might say, paused before he spoke. Then he answered, "Christ guide you and give you heaven's bliss of your husband, wherever he may be. I am born too low to know such a woman as you."<sup>33</sup> I arrived in thrall and became a foundling. It would not be fitting for you to be bound to me as my wife. It would not be a fair wedding between a thrall and a king."<sup>34</sup>

Rymenhild was displeased with his words. She gave a big sigh, threw her arms up, and fell down in a faint. Horn's heart was full of sadness; he took her in both arms and began to kiss her. He said, "Darling, dear, you do not control your heart. Help me with all your might to become a knight to my lord the king. If he dubs me, he thus turns my thralldom to knighthood, and I shall wax more and do as you instruct, my dear."<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Her disregard of reputation is an indication of her passion for Horn.

<sup>31</sup> Heroes often shed light in darkness (e.g., a light glows in Havelok's mouth when he sleeps) or, as here, increase illumination. Here, the motif may indicate the psychological nature of Rymenhild's response to Horn's appearance.

<sup>32</sup> Kneeling, or genuflecting, before a lady is the conventional posture of a knight or courtly lover before his lady.

<sup>33</sup> Birth was a major consideration in marriage and was appropriate, sometimes legal, only between those of similar rank. Although Horn has previously indicated royal birth, he lacks standing in Westernesse.

<sup>34</sup> A thrall lacked the arms required to prove merit and worthiness as a knight. Later, knighthood became a matter of birth as class structure became more rigid and as the wealth to obtain arms and maintain social status remained concentrated in a relatively few families.

<sup>35</sup> In courtly love, a woman provided moral instruction and assigned tasks to her knight, who performed them to prove his worth. An variant use of this motif occurs in *Othello*, in which Othello's tale of prior heroic deeds wins Desdemona's love. Horn's social skill is suggested in his controlling Rymenhild without appearing to do so; indeed, by appearing to follow her instruction.

The sweet Rymenhild roused from her faint. She said, "Horn, all that will be done shortly. You will be dubbed knight before seven nights have passed. Take this cup and ring to Athelbrus the steward and advise him to keep his word. Tell him that I beseech him to kneel before the king in the hall and ask him to dub you a knight at once. I shall reward him well with silver and gold. Christ grant him success in advancing your cause."

Horn took his leave, for it was near evening. He sought Athelbrus, gave him what he brought, quickly reported how he had fared, told him his needs, and promised him his reward. As soon as possible, Athelbrus went to the hall. He said, "King, you listen to a tale as well as any. Tomorrow is your feast day, you bear the crown in this town,<sup>36</sup> and there must be fitting festivities. It would not be amiss to knight young Horn so that he might wield your arms; he will make a good knight."

The King replied, "That is well done. Horn greatly pleases me; he seems to be a good knight. I shall dub him and make him my favorite. All his friends he himself will make knights, all that he will call knights before me this night."

Aylmar thought to himself throughout the night. When day broke, Horn and his twelve friends came before the king. (Some of them were wicked.) The king dubbed Horn a knight, with bright sword and spurs. He set him on a white steed—there was no knight like him—smote him a gentle blow, and bid him be a good knight.<sup>37</sup>

Thereupon, Athulf fell on his knees before King Aylmar. He said, "King so daring, grant me a boon! Sir Horn, born in Suddene, is now a knight; lord of his land, he is over us who have stood by him; he has your arms and shield to fight with on the field. Have him make us knights, for that is our right."<sup>38</sup>

Aylmar replied, "Do what you want." Horn dismounted and made them knights. The feast was merry, with many fine games. Rymenhild was not there,<sup>39</sup> and Horn's absence seemed like seven years to her.<sup>40</sup> She sent for Horn; pacing the floor, she awaited his arrival eagerly. Horn went to her chamber; he would not go alone but took his friend Athulf with him. She greeted them: "Welcome, Sir Horn, and Athulf, your knight. Knight, now is the time for you to sit by me. Now you have what you wanted; now you must do what you promised, if you are true in deed, to take me as your wife and release me from my anguish."

He replied, "Rymenhild, be still. I shall do all that you want but only as it must be done. Before I begin to woo you, I must ride with spear in order to prove my knighthood. I am a new knight, created this very day, and my calling has a custom: to

---

<sup>36</sup> Kings wore their crowns only on special occasions like ceremonies.

<sup>37</sup> Dubbing was a blow to the cheek and a tapping of a sword on the shoulder. Any knight could make others knights, but young heroes often chose to be knighted by a knight of high rank.

Putting on a sword was essential. Spurs were given at any time, but often after the newly dubbed knight's first success in combat, thus, "winning one's spurs."

<sup>38</sup> Athulf wants to be dubbed, not by Aylmar, who is king of Westernesne, but by Horn, who is his leader pledged to return to Suddene and to whom he owes his allegiance.

<sup>39</sup> In these times, women dined apart from men.

<sup>40</sup> The simile is artful foreshadowing.

fight well for one's beloved with some other knight before he take a wife.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, I must make haste. Today, as Christ blesses me, I shall, for your love,<sup>42</sup> do deeds of valor in the field of battle with spear and with shield. If I return alive, I shall make you my wife."

She responded, "True knight, I think that I may believe you. Take now this gold ring (good is its ornamentation); engraved on it are the words 'Rymenhild the young.' No one knows of a better ring under the sun. For my love, wear it on your finger. The stones have such power that, no matter where you are, you need not be afraid of blows or confounded in battle if you look upon my ring and think of your beloved.<sup>43</sup> And Sir Athulf, your brother, will have another ring for himself. Horn, in the most loving words, I pray that Christ give you good success in order to bring you back to me." The knight kissed her, and she blessed him.

Horn took his leave and went into the hall. The knights went to the table, but Horn went to the stable, where he saddled his good coal-black steed.<sup>44</sup> The steed pranced about and shook its armor so vigorously that the entire court resounded.<sup>45</sup> Horn sang with joy.

Horn rode more than a mile. He found a ship full of heathen hounds,<sup>46</sup> riding the waves. He asked them what brought them to this land and what they sought.<sup>47</sup> One hound who saw him spoke in a haughty manner: "We mean to take this land and slay all living in it." Horn gripped his sword and wiped it on his arm. With vigor, he smote the Saracens; his blood grew hot. Every blow struck off a head. The hounds then rushed about Horn, fighting alone. He looked on the ring and thought of Rymenhild. In a short time, he slew a hundred at least on the spot. No one could tell how many pagans he killed in all. Those not slain at once were fatally wounded. Horn cut off the leader's head, set it high on the point of his sword, rode back to the court, and joined the knights in the hall.

He said, "King, now you are at ease with your knights. Today, after my dubbing, I rode at my pleasure and found a ship rowing to shore and full, not of natives, but of

---

<sup>41</sup> Horn implies that doing deeds of knighthood is more important than having title to the rank of knight.

<sup>42</sup> Doing deeds of valor for a lady's love is the nexus of chivalry and courtly love. When courtly love dominates, deeds inspired by and dedicated to the lady are a measure of his merit and are valuable only if the lady finds them worthy. The conflict between service to one's lord (or, later, the state) and one's lady is central to Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and is suggested in Othello's final speech.

<sup>43</sup> Ladies often give gift rings or other tokens with magical powers to their lovers. Such magical objects are common in medieval romances, but infrequent in English medieval romances. Othello's mother's handkerchief, on his telling of it, is a notable renaissance instance.

<sup>44</sup> Horn is initially given a white steed.

<sup>45</sup> A knight's horse was protected by chain mail.

<sup>46</sup> Enemies in medieval romances are often identified, not as Christian, but as Mohammedan, foes. By folk etymology, "Mohammed" becomes "Mahound" becomes "hound," which equates to "dog."

<sup>47</sup> Like his father, Murry, Horn encounters Saracens on the shore, asks them their business, and engages them in battle. Murry, with two companions, is defeated; Horn, alone, is victorious. The parallel is intended for favorable comparison; in romances involving the exile-and-return motif, the son is often better than his father in some thematically important respect. (Thus, Malcolm is better than Duncan in ascertaining loyalty in his followers.)

bold Saracens meaning to trouble you and your kingdom. They attacked me. My sword would not fail me.<sup>48</sup> All I smote to the ground or gave mortal wounds. The head which I bring you is their leader's.<sup>49</sup> King, your decision to dub me a knight is now repaid."

At sunrise, the King rode off to hunt. He left Fikenhild, the most evil of any mother's child, at court. Horn went to Rymenhild's chamber to report his adventure. He found her sitting by the window; she was wet with tears, as if she had been driven mad. Horn said, "Dear, a favor. Why weep you so bitterly?"

She answered, "I weep for nothing except a bad dream which I had. I dreamed that I cast my net into the sea, but it was torn apart. A large fish promptly broke through it. I feared that I should lose the fish which I had chosen."

Then Horn said, "Christ and Saint Steven<sup>50</sup> give you a favorable meaning of your dream!<sup>51</sup> I shall not deceive you or displease you in anything. I shall make myself yours, to have and to know before any other man, and to that end, I pledge my troth."<sup>52</sup> Rymenhild's sorrow was great at his pledge, for she kept on weeping. Horn let her cry herself out. "Darling," he said, "dear one, let me go on. Either the dream means good, or some man will harm us. The fish which broke through the net—indeed, it will hurt us. The pain will soon appear and cause us anguish."

Aylmar rode by Sture, and Horn remained in Rymenhild's chamber. Fikenhild was envious and spoke strong words to the King. "Aylmar, I warn you that Horn will destroy you! I heard what he said and saw him lay out his sword; he means to kill you and make Rymenhild his wife. He now lies in her chamber, under sheets beside your daughter, Rymenhild; so he often does. If you go there quickly, you might find him. Either you must expel him from this land, or he shall harm you."

At these words, Aylmar first grew sad, then angry. He found Horn in Rymenhild's embrace, his head on her bosom. He thundered, "Get out, you foul thief; you will never more be dear to me! Leave my dwelling this instant; leave my land, with much misfortune. Make haste, or I myself shall strike you with my sword."

Horn saddled his steed and laid out his arms. He laced on his mail as if he were going to a tournament and grasped his sword.<sup>53</sup> He did not long delay his departure but went forth quickly to his wife, Rymenhild. "Beloved darling," he said, "your dream has now come to pass! The fish which tore your net sends me away from you. Make the best of my parting, Rymenhild; I may stay here no longer. I shall go to a foreign land to seek more adventures. I shall live there for seven full years. At the end of that time, if I do

---

<sup>48</sup> The poet subtly imputes magic to the sword by suggesting that it "would" not fail as opposed to that it "did" not fail. Magic swords, like Excalibur in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, are commonplaces in romance.

<sup>49</sup> Cutting off one's opponent's head, putting it on a pole or spear, and bearing it to court was a long-standing practice; it is recorded in the Bible.

<sup>50</sup> Saint Stephen is associated with miracles.

<sup>51</sup> In medieval and renaissance times, dreams were often believed to presage the future, if properly interpreted (not, as in modern therapy, to reveal and thereby to help reform an individual's psyche).

<sup>52</sup> This formula derives, of course, from the marriage ceremony.

<sup>53</sup> Tournament armor was a knight's best, or at least dressiest, armor.

not come to you or send a message, take another husband; do not delay longer on my account. Take me in you arms, and give me a good kiss goodbye.”

Rymenhild gave him a long and loving kiss, then slid to the ground. Horn took his leave, for he might tarry there no longer. With his arm around the neck of his best friend, Athulf, he said, “Knight so true, keep well my new love. You have never forsaken me; now take charge of Rymenhild and protect her from harm.” Then he mounted his steed, rode forth to the harbor, and hired a good ship to take him to the western land. Athulf and all who saw him leave wept.

### III. IRELAND: STEWARDSHIP

The wind began to rise and drove Horn to Ireland. When he landed, he mounted his horse. As he rode along, he met the King’s sons, Berold and Harold. Berold courteously asked Horn’s name and what he wanted there. Horn said, “I am called Cutbeard; I have traveled far from my home in the east in order to seek my fortune.”

Berold rode near; taking Horn’s horse by the bridle, he said, “It is a good thing that I found you. You must stay with me for a while. As I must die, you shall serve the King. Never in my life have I seen a fairer knight!” He led Cutbeard into the hall; they fell on their knees and properly greeted the good king. Then his son Berold said, “Sir King, you should engage his services; take him to guard your land; it will do no one any harm, for he is the fairest man that ever came to your land.”

Then the dear king said, “Welcome be you here! Berold, go quickly and make Cutbeard happy. When you first woo a woman, get his word that he will not compete with you, for, if you two compete, he will drive you off, and you will not succeed in overcoming him because of his good looks.”

On Christmas day, just at noon, a great armed giant came from pagandom and addressed the court<sup>54</sup>: “Sir King, sit and listen to my news. Pagans have arrived here; more than a few are on the shore and in your land. One of them will fight against three of your knights. If your three slay our one, this land will stay yours; but, if our one overcomes your three, this land will be ours. The fight will be tomorrow, at sunrise.”

Then King Thurston said, “Cutbeard is the first; Berold, the second, and Harold, his brother, the third. For they are the strongest at arms. But who can advise us on our best course of action? I think that we are all doomed.”

Cutbeard, who sat at the table, spoke up: “Sir King, it is not right for three to fight one, three Christian men to take their chances against one hound. Sir, I shall fight alone, with no help from them or their companions, and easily slay this one with my sword.”<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Christmas day is a conventional time of challenge by a heathen giant or enemy in medieval romance. A well-known example is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

<sup>55</sup> Horn’s (“Cutbeard’s”) confidence is a hero’s confidence that, in medieval romance, right makes might (idealism), not might makes right (realism). Romance assumes a morally ordered universe in which right prevails. Thus, Horn here can overcome a larger and physically more powerful enemy as he has earlier

The King awoke the next day with much sorrow; Cutbeard rose from his bed and equipped himself with his arms. He threw on his mail corselet and laced it tight. He came to the King as he arose. He said, “King, come to the field to watch how we fight and go at it together” Just at six o’clock, he rode forth and found a very bold giant in the field, his companions beside him awaiting the outcome.

Cutbeard began the battle. They dealt each other many blows; the two other knights fell down dazed, and the giant’s attack slackened, for he was almost dead. He said, “Knights, rest yourselves a while if you desire” and added that he had never had such hard blows except by King Murry of Suddene, Horn’s father, a sturdy fellow.<sup>56</sup>

Horn shuddered when he heard these words, and his blood rose. Recognizing the one standing before him as the one who had slain his father and driven him from the land, he drew his sword against the giant. He looked on his ring and thought of Rymenhild. He stabbed the giant in the heart—a killing blow. The other pagans, who had been so bold earlier, now ran away. Horn and his company rushed after them and slew the hounds before they reached their ships. Indeed, they killed them all and thus paid for the death of Horn’s father’s. Not one of the King’s knights was harmed except for his two sons, whom the King saw die before his very eyes. The King grieved, and tears fell from his eyes. His men laid his sons on a bier and buried them quickly.

The King entered his hall and joined his knights. He said, “Horn, take the advice I am now going to give you. My heirs are slain; you are a knight of fair build, great strength, great value. You shall rule my realm and receive as your wife my daughter, Reynild, who sits in an upper chamber.”<sup>57</sup>

Horn replied, “O, Sir King, I would do wrong to take your advice and accept your offer to rule in your realm and marry your daughter. Sir King, I shall serve you well for a long time before you die. Before seven years pass, your sorrow will change. Sir King, when it is gone, give me a reward; when I desire your daughter, you shall not refuse her to me.”

Cutbeard lived there for seven full years; during that time, he did not return to Rymenhild or send a message to her. She stayed in Westernesse with great sorrow. Meanwhile, a king who wished to marry her arrived there; both kings agreed on the marriage. The days until the ceremony were so few that Rymenhild could not risk delaying them in any way. But she did devise a letter, and Athulf, who loved Horn not a little, wrote it.<sup>58</sup>

She sent her messenger to seek her knight Horn<sup>59</sup> in every land where he might be. Horn heard nothing of these events until one day he went hunting in the wood. Meeting

---

overcome a more numerous enemy.

Battles between champions of opposing sides are primarily dramatic representations of political and religious thematic conflicts given heightened interest by conflicting personal motives or emotions.

<sup>56</sup> These remarks invite comparison of Murry the father and Horn the son. Horn is motivated by both service and now revenge.

<sup>57</sup> The line of succession was not a matter of law or even invariable custom in medieval times. Horn is selected as the worthiest knight. Marriage to the king’s daughter would be an additional sanction.

<sup>58</sup> The ability to read and write was uncommon among the aristocracy in the thirteenth century.

<sup>59</sup> Horn’s name is now resumed since his assumed name is no longer needed.

a man there, he asked, “Dear friend, what do you seek here?” The man replied, “Knight, if it is your will, I shall soon tell you. I come from the east looking for Horn of Westernesse on behalf of a maiden Rymenhild, who waxes wild for him. King Mody of Reynes,<sup>60</sup> one of Horn’s enemies, will marry her and take her to his bed. I have walked far by the sea side, but nowhere is he to be found. Alas the times! Now Rymenhild will be led awry.”

Horn heard all the man said and then spoke with bitter tears: “Fellow, good fortune come to you! Horn stands beside you. Return to Rymenhild; tell her not to grieve, for I shall be there quickly, by six o’clock Sunday morning.”

The news pleased the man, who hastened to return to court. But his ship sank; he drowned; well might Rymenhild rue his mishap! The sea was able to wash his body up onto shore, right under her chamber wall. Rymenhild undid the door-bolt of her dwelling in order to go to look herself for Horn. When she found the drowned man whom she had sent for Horn and who should have brought him back, she wrung her hands.<sup>61</sup>

Horn returned to Thurston the King and told him his news. He told him of Rymenhild, his beloved; of his good father, the King of Suddene; and of his slaying the one who killed his father. He said, “King, wise as you are, repay me for my service. Help me to win Rymenhild! Do not fail me, and I shall arrange for your daughter to be well married. She will have Athulf, my best friend, the truest knight, as good as the best.”<sup>62</sup>

The King replied softly, “Horn, you may have your wish.” He sent writs<sup>63</sup> to Ireland for skillful knights and Irish warriors. They came to Horn, embarked with him on a good ship, and set forth. The wind soon blew strongly, and the sea drove them right toward Westernesse. They struck sail and mast, and cast anchor before daybreak, before the ringing of any bell which might have told of Rymenhild’s wedding.<sup>64</sup> Horn could not have arrived a moment later; he landed just in time, leaped into the water, let the ship ride at anchor, and waded ashore. He ordered his troop of knights and soldiers to wait at the edge of the wood. Horn set out by himself, alone, as if he had sprung from a stone.<sup>65</sup>

#### IV: WESTERNESSE: MARRIAGE

On the way, Horn met a palmer<sup>66</sup> and greeted him warmly: “Palmer, tell me all the

---

<sup>60</sup> The identity of this place is unknown; it may possibly be Rennes in Brittany or Rheims.

<sup>61</sup> The narrative sequence differs from the “actual” sequence. The effect is to create suspense and focus on Horn’s return.

<sup>62</sup> The motif of a king aiding an exile occurs in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, when Edward III aids Malcolm’s return to England.

<sup>63</sup> Writs are legal demands for services required under feudal law.

<sup>64</sup> Bells were rung for all religious services, including marriages.

<sup>65</sup> A medieval superstition held that the first men came from stones and thus were solitary.

<sup>66</sup> A palmer is a pilgrim. Pilgrims to the Holy Lands often carried palm leaves (hence, their name) for shade. Pilgrims renounced worldly goods and begged for sustenance.



news.” The palmer said, “I come from a bridal party at Rymenhild’s wedding. She could not help weeping. Resisting marriage for money, she said she had a husband who was out of the country. I was at the stronghold gate within the castle walls; they would not let me in. Mody ordered men to lead Rymenhild to her chamber. I crept away; I would not endure the sorrow. The bride weeps; there is much grief!”

Horn said, “As Christ advises me, we shall exchange clothes.<sup>67</sup> Take mine, and give me yours. I shall drink there today; some will regret it.” The priest took Horn’s not displeasing clothes, took off his robe, and put it on Horn’s back. Horn took the staff and wallet. He smeared his face and neck with dirt, distorted his expression, and made himself so unappealing that he has never yet had an equal.<sup>68</sup>

Horn came to the gate guard, who rudely replied to many meek and mild requests to open the gate and refused to let him in.<sup>69</sup> Horn turned from the gate and kicked open the guardhouse door. The guard had to pay for his rude refusals. Horn threw him over the drawbridge and broke all his ribs. Then he went in through the gate.

He sat in the beggars’ row at the foot of the table. There, hidden by his dirty face, he looked about. He saw Rymenhild sitting at the window as if she were distraught, weeping so sorely and sighing so deeply that no man might stop her grief. He looked in each corner of the hall, but, as he could tell, his friend Athulf was not to be seen.

Athulf, in the tower, was looking out to sea in order to learn whether Horn were coming and a ship bringing him. He saw the sea flowing but not Horn sailing on it. He said to himself, “Horn, you are a long time coming. You entrusted Rymenhild to me, and I have protected her ever since. Come now or never; I may no longer protect her. I weep for sorrow.”

Rymenhild rose from her seat in order to pour wine, for it is served after a dinner of meat and ale. She bore a drinking horn in her hand, as was the custom in the land. Knights and squires drank all the beer. Horn alone had no share of it. Sitting on the ground, he was overcome by emotion. At last, he said, “Gracious queen, make your way toward me; first pour for us since beggars are very thirsty.”<sup>70</sup>

Rymenhild laid down the drinking horn and filled his bowl with a gallon from a brown bowl, for she thought he was a glutton.<sup>71</sup> She said, “Have this cup and this bowl too. I never saw, as I never thought to see, a beggar so bold.”

Giving it to his companions, Horn said, “Queen so dear, I desire no wine at all unless

---

<sup>67</sup> A palmer’s clothes are a common disguise in medieval and renaissance literature, as in the anonymous *King Lear*.

<sup>68</sup> Disguises as beggars were a commonplace of romances. Edgar adopts a similar disguise in *King Lear*.

<sup>69</sup> A rude welcome at a castle gate was a conventional sign of misrule. The porter at the gate in *Macbeth* verges on this convention.

The combination of religious disguise and this moral language may mean to associate Horn and Jesus.

<sup>70</sup> Beggars were admitted to weddings and served by brides as a sign of aristocratic generosity; refusal to serve beggars was a sign of niggardliness.

<sup>71</sup> Nobles drank from horns; commoners drank from clay bowls.

it comes from the drinking horn used by the nobles. You think I am a beggar, but I am a fisher who has come a long way from the east in order to fish at your feast. My net lies here at hand by a fair shore. It has lain there for seven full years.<sup>72</sup> I have traveled far and now have returned to look to see if it has caught any fish. I do not wish to drink from a bowl but to drink to Horn from a horn.”

Rymenhild looked more closely at him, and her heart felt a chill. She did not understand his fishing or recognize Horn himself, but she thought it strange that he asked to drink to Horn. She filled her horn with wine and drank to the pilgrim. Then she passed him the horn and said, “Drink your fill; then tell me the truth, if you ever saw Horn lie in the wood.”

Horn drank from the horn a while, put his ring at the bottom of it, and said, “Queen, now seek what is in your drink.”

The Queen went to her chamber with her four maidens. Then she found what she would, the ring of graven gold which she had given Horn. Fearing its reappearance meant that Horn was dead, she sent a damsel after the palmer. The damsel said, “Palmer true, the ring which you put in the cup—tell me where you got it and why you came here.”

He said, “By Saint Giles,<sup>73</sup> I have many miles to go, far beyond the west to seek my fortune. I found the knight Horn in a far land about to board a ship. He said that he would try to reach Westernesse. We took to sea in the ship. Horn was sick and died; he prayed me politely, ‘Take young Rymenhild the ring’—often he kissed it! God give your soul peace!”<sup>74</sup>

At the news, Rymenhild cried, “Heart, break now, for you have Horn no more, for whom you have longed so sorely.” She fell on her bed, where she had hidden a knife in order to slay both the hated king and herself that very night if Horn did not arrive.<sup>75</sup> She set the knife to her heart, but Horn caught her in time. He wiped the dirt off his neck and said, “Dear, sweet Queen, I am your Horn, of Westernesse. Do you not recognize me? Take me in your arms, and kiss me.” They kissed each other with true love and rejoiced.

He said, “Rymenhild, I shall go to the edge of the woods; my soldiers are there, ready to fight. They carry arms under their clothes and will be angry that the King and his guest come to the feast. I shall teach them a lesson and strike them sorely.”

Horn sprang out from the hall and let his robe fall. The Queen went from her chamber and found Athulf in the tower. She said, “Athulf, be happy and go as quickly as possible to Horn. He is under the bough of the tree, with his many knights.

---

<sup>72</sup> A fisher is a moral or theological inquirer. Horn gives Rymenhild many hints of his identity, but she does not penetrate his disguise.

<sup>73</sup> The identity of this saint is unknown.

<sup>74</sup> Horn’s fabrication may be a test of Rymenhild’s love.

<sup>75</sup> Rymenhild’s plot for murder and suicide indicates her true love for Horn and her conviction, reflecting a social code then greatly valuing virginity, “better dead than bed.”

Athulf leaped up at the news and went after Horn as fast as his horse could gallop. Indeed, he overtook Horn, and they both rejoiced greatly at their reunion. Horn set his warriors on the march. Shortly thereafter, fully and heavily armed from head to foot, he entered the castle; the gates were down. He made all who were at the feast except King Aylmar and his twelve friends sorry that they were there. He and his soldiers let them have their lives. Horn exacted no terrible vengeance on Fikenhild on account of his false tongue.<sup>76</sup> Those who were spared swore oaths that they would never betray Horn even though he might lie near death.

They rang the bell in order to carry out the wedding. Horn went with his men to the King's palace. There was a sweet bridal party since rich men were feasting there. Horn sat on a chair and told them all to hear him. He said, "King, you listen to a tale as well as any; I shall now tell one without reproach to you. Horn is my name. You raised me to knighthood and have tested it. King, men told you that I betrayed you; so you made me flee you and leave your land. You thought that I plotted to do something which never occurred to me, to lie by Rymenhild. All that I deny, and I shall not seek to lie by her until I win Suddene. Keep her here for a time while I fight to get back my heritage and baronage. I shall recover that land and avenge my father's death. I shall be king of the town and bear the king's crown. Then shall Rymenhild lie by the king."

#### V: SUDDENE: RESTORATION

Horn went to his ship with his Irish followers and Athulf, his best friend; he wanted no others. The ship set sail, the wind blew, and in five days, the ship arrived, at midnight. Promptly, Horn went to Athulf, took him by the hand, and together they went ashore. They found a fully armed and skillful knight sleeping soundly by the roadside.<sup>77</sup> On his shield was drawn the cross of Jesus Christ's faith.<sup>78</sup> Horn shook him and said, "Knight, wake up! Tell us what you guard and why you sleep here? I think that your cross means that you belong to the Lord. But unless you tell me what I need to know, I shall cut you to pieces."

Terrified by Horn's words, the good knight arose. He said, "I serve the pagans against my will. I was a Christian once. Then the black Saracens came to this island and made me forsake Christ, in Whom I believed. They made me the officer to guard this pass against the return of Horn, who is now an adult, the best of knights, living in the west. The pagans themselves slew the courteous king of this land, King Murry, Horn's father, and, with him, many hundreds more. They sent Horn into exile with his twelve friends, among them, the good Athulf, who was my child, my son. (Horn loves him dearly and is like a guardian to him.) It is strange Horn has not come to avenge their deaths. God send him the right and the wind to drive him here in order to kill them. If I might see those two just once again, I should die for joy."

---

<sup>76</sup> This statement is not an understatement; the narrator saves Fikenhild for greater treachery later.

<sup>77</sup> A sleeping knight indicates a lack of will to do his duty.

<sup>78</sup> The existence of this Christian symbol is not, of course, consistent with the pagans' anti-Christian repression, but it quickly indicates the knight's loyalties.

Horn said, "Knight, be happy, then, on this happiest occasion. Horn and Athulf, his comrade, are both here." The knight went to Horn and at once greeted him. They made much joy there while they were together. He asked, "Children, how have you been? It has been a long time since I have seen you. Will you retake this land and slay all that live in it? Dear knight Horn, your mother Godhild still lives; she must be pleased if she knew you were alive."

Horn then delivered a short speech. "Blessed be the time now that I have come to Suddene with my Irish soldiers. We shall teach the hounds to speak our speech.<sup>79</sup> We shall slay all of them or cause them to flee quickly."

Horn then blew his horn. His people recognized him; they came out of their homes and rallied around his banner.<sup>80</sup> They fought the rest of the night and well into the next morning. In the end, they slew so many Saracens that none remained.

Horn had the chapels and churches cleaned, the bells rung, and masses sung.<sup>81</sup> He went to his mother's hermitage in the cave. He took food; they had a merry feast and made a merry time of it.

But Rymenhild paid for it. Fikenhild stayed proud of heart, and it pained him. He gave gems and other riches to young and old in the hope of persuading them to follow him and stand by him.<sup>82</sup> He built a strong castle with a sea-fed moat around it. The only things which might enter were birds which flew in, but, when the sea withdrew at low tide, enough men might enter.<sup>83</sup> Fikenhild plotted to seize Rymenhild and began to woo her in earnest; the King dared not refuse him. Rymenhild was full of fears; she wept tears of blood.<sup>84</sup>

That same night, Horn tossed and turned in a sweat because of a dream of Rymenhild, his mate. He dreamed she was taken aboard a ship which lurched in heavy seas and then sank. He feared that his darling would drown. Rymenhild tried to swim to land, but Fikenhild repulsed her with the hilt of his sword. Horn, a man in a hurry, awoke from his sleep. He said, "Athulf, my friend, we must go to the ship. Fikenhild has betrayed me again and threatens Rymenhild. Christ, for His five wounds, drive me there tonight!" Horn boarded the ship and set sail, with his companions beside him.

## VI. WESTERNESSE: RESCUE AND REVENGE

Before daybreak, Fikenhild went straight to the King for Rymenhild the bright, with

---

<sup>79</sup> Linguistic dominance then as now often reflects cultural, if not political, dominance.

<sup>80</sup> Blowing the horn, which echoes Aylmar's predication and plays upon the hero's name, rallies support, as it was intended to do in *The Song of Roland*. The support is popular and epical, not aristocratic and romantic.

<sup>81</sup> This cleaning of the church is paralleled by the Maccabees' cleansing of the Temple after the Syrian occupation.

<sup>82</sup> The writer implicitly distinguishes generosity from bribery.

<sup>83</sup> This fact, of which no use is made, may be a detail surviving from an earlier version of the Horn story.

<sup>84</sup> People under great stress can weep as well as sweat blood.

the aim of marrying her that night. In the dark, he led her into his new fortress. They began the festivities even before the sun arose. At the same time, before Horn knew it, his ship was below the tower chamber which held Rymenhild, who little suspected he was then alive. Horn and his men did not know the castle because it was so new. Horn found Arnoldin, Athulf's cousin, then standing watch and waiting for Horn. He said, "Knight Horn, a king's son, it is a good thing that you have come to this land. Fikenhild has wedded your sweet love Rymenhild today. I shall not lie; he has beguiled you twice. Because of you, he had this tower made. No one can get in, no matter what means he uses. Horn, Christ guide you to Rymenhild, whom you miss."

Horn knew all the tricks which a man might know. He drew out his harp. He picked from his companions the most skillful of his knights, who disguised themselves as they wished. They went by the gravel path to the castle. As they drew near, Horn played the harp, and they sang merrily.

Rymenhild heard the music and asked who they were. Her maidens said they were harpers and jugglers. She admitted Horn and his companions at the gate of the hall. He set them on the bench and held on to his harp. He played a sad lovesong for Rymenhild; she made a great grief and fell into a faint. No one laughed; it struck his heart so hard that it hurt. Horn looked on Rymenhild's ring and thought of her. He went to the table with his good sharp sword. Fikenhild's head tumbled down; Horn slew his men, one by one. When all were dead, he quartered Fikenhild.<sup>85</sup> He made Arnoldin, because of his mildness, the king of all Westernesse to succeed King Aylmar. The King and his vassals gave Arnoldin tribute.

## VII. SUDDENE: CORONATION, CONCLUSION, AND BENEDICTION

Horn took Rymenhild by the hand; he led her and Athelbrus, the good steward of the house, to the shore. The sea began to rise, and Horn set sail. They arrived where Mody had been king. There he made Athelbrus king because of his good teaching. Athelbrus gave all his knights riches according to knight Horn's advice. Again, Horn set sail, and the wind blew him a long way, all the way to Ireland, where he found great sadness. There he arranged for Athulf to marry the maiden Reynild.

Finally, Horn returned to Suddene among all his relations. He made Rymenhild his queen so that all might at last be well. All the people who loved them truly might sympathize with them. Now they both are dead; may Christ lead them to heaven!

Here ends the tale of Horn, who was fair and not ugly. Let us rejoice at this ending of his story. May Jesus, Who is heaven's King, give all of us His sweet blessing.

---

<sup>85</sup> Among other punishments, including partial strangulation, burning with various hot liquids poured into open wounds, disemboweling and burning bowels, traitors and felons were also cut into quarters or pulled apart by horses.